

BREAKING GROUND



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TENNESSEE
COUNCIL



BREAKING GROUND

no.41 housing issue

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Cover photo by Sharon Lee

CONTACT INFORMATION



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E-MAIL: breakingground@vanderbilt.edu.

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CHARLES HALL Settles into His DREAM HOUSE

BY BARBIE WITT, JEANETTE BUNT AND TOM SUMMERS

Owning a home is the American Dream. For many people, this dream seems to be just that, a dream. For Charles Hall of Nashville, that dream has become a reality thanks to his Circle of Support, friends and Habitat for Humanity.

Mr. Hall has desired to own his own home for a long time, but it never seemed quite possible. Due to the visionary efforts of his former Independent Support Coordinator and current advocate, Leticia Dismukes, the process of applying to be a Habitat for Humanity recipient was started. After a lengthy application process—approximately two years—Mr. Hall was interviewed by the Habitat selection committee. They were charmed, as most people who come into contact with him are. He was approved to be a recipient in August 2007. His home build began in September of 2007, and was completed at the end of October. Mr. Hall had a big smile on his face when he cut the ribbon to his brand new home.

During his build, Mr. Hall asked, “I know when I will get my key to my house, but when will I get my key to my mailbox?” Having never been a homeowner, he didn’t know his mail would be delivered to his personal mailbox at the end of his driveway. What’s even more exciting is that he can watch from his window to see when the mail is delivered!

Mr. Hall loves to sing. Since getting his new home, he has sung more than ever! He feels very safe in his new neighborhood and loves going for long walks. His previous home was dark and a little depressing. His new home is open, bright and cheerful, even without the lights on.

Before moving to his new home, Mr. Hall would call his friends several times a day wanting reassurance and contact. Since moving, those calls have become less frequent, proving how much more stable and secure he feels. He’s also very concerned about his finances and is happy knowing his current mortgage is less than his previous rent.

Mr. Hall had a housewarming party in his new home, which provided him with the opportunity to play host, one of his favorite roles. He also celebrated his birthday in his new home and decorated it for the holidays.

During the building process, Mr. Hall was limited in the jobs he could do, but he was a great cheerleader for the rest of the group. Along with Ms. Dismukes and team leader, Sharon Lee, Mr. Hall attended numerous sweat equity classes to learn the basics of being a

homeowner. He also learned he was the recipient of a \$5,000 grant, which lowered his mortgage even more.

Mr. Hall has become a role model for his community. Not only has he received a home which brings him pride, comfort and happiness, he has expanded his group of friends. He’s also looking forward to becoming a member of his homeowner’s association and would like to be the vice president of it someday.

Barbie Witt is an independent service coordinator with the Arc of Davidson County. Tom Summers is director of Training and Staff Development with the Middle Tennessee Regional Office of the Division of Mental Retardation Services and has been Mr. Hall’s friend and a member of his circle of support for 35 years. Jeanette Bunt is a behavior therapist who has worked with Mr. Hall for ten years.



Photo by Sharon Lee

Charles Hall’s house under construction.

A DREAM COME TRUE: Steps to Home Ownership

BY CAROL GREENWALD

Keith Greenwald has been a homeowner for almost a year. It is a dream come true for him and for me, his mom. It is a wonderful feeling knowing Keith now has a home that he can stay in without wondering if he might need to move for the convenience of others. He will always have final say about the person or persons with whom he shares his home and he can decide to add a room or change the color of his walls because it is HIS home.

It all started in August, 2006, with a phone call. "You have received a check from Social Security. You have six months to spend it or it will need to be returned." In 1999, Keith had found out that working made him eligible for Social Security Disability benefits (SSDI), but when he tried to apply, the Social Security clerk had said, "Your application will just be put in a drawer. We are not enrolling anyone who is eligible for both SSDI and SSI (Supplemental Security Income)." To which Keith replied, "OK, take my application anyway." When the federal government finally enrolled him (without telling him), it owed him a lot of money!

We thought about what to do and talked to friends, Michele Flynn, who had worked for several years with the Council on Developmental Disabilities' Home of Your Own project, and Keith's support agency. Keith decided that he would use the money for a down payment on a house. His search took us to 30 or 40 different places in many different Memphis neighborhoods. He made offers on some houses with no luck. Then we walked into 3378 Highland Park Place and couldn't believe our eyes—we had found the perfect house just as time was running out. It had white siding and green shutters, a fireplace, three bedrooms, two bathrooms, a big deck and yard. We couldn't help feeling that it was "meant to be". And along the way we learned several things that helped us and might help others.

Priorities in house hunting

Some of the homes Keith could afford were not in safe neighborhoods or they were too far from his work, family, walkable shopping or bus lines. He also needed space for privacy and the potential for adding another housemate, if necessary. A big question was answered when his supported living agency, West Tennessee Family Solutions (WTFS), agreed to maintain the home for a monthly fee. So think about:

- location;
- transportation availability;
- space needs;
- maintenance considerations; and
- supports needed.



Keith Greenwald gets the key to his home from Martine Hobson.

Making a budget and documenting sources of income

When Keith applied for a home loan, the bank wanted his credit history. Although he had a checking account, he had never had utilities, a phone or a loan in his name. Fortunately, Keith was able to get a statement from WTFS about his monthly expenses, that he paid his rent on time, that he paid his half of utilities and that he had specific sources of reliable income. The agency also documented, in writing, that it would be responsible for making sure that the loan payments would be on time.

These statements were very helpful. The listing of income and expenses also provided Keith with a budget about how much house he could afford. Something important to Keith was that sharing expenses with his housemate did not add to his income. After checking with the Division of Mental Retardation Services (DMRS), a Shared Residence Agreement was approved so that Keith's housemate's "rent" and other payments for expenses went directly to the bank and utility companies and did not become part of Keith's income.

If you want to own a home, here are some tips for establishing a credit history:

- have some bills in the potential home owner's own name;
- open a checking account and use it to pay expenses;
- document consistent payment of expenses (rent, utilities, phone) even if not made by loan applicant;
- if possible, take out a small loan and pay it back; and
- document eligibility for government assistance.

Explore sources for Down Payment Assistance and loans for low income and first time home buyers

None of the low-income programs in Memphis helped Keith, for various reasons, but there are many programs that could help others. People who receive Medicaid assistance are not allowed to save money, which is a huge barrier to ever having a down payment for a house. Bills have been proposed to change these Medicaid rules but, in the meantime, don't give up on owning a home until you've explored whether you can get down payment assistance.

Some people also may have a special needs trust to use for a down payment. Sometimes Section 8 Vouchers may be used for mortgage payments. Medicaid rules **DO** allow a person to own a home as long as it is that person's residence.

Finding a mortgage lender and realtor

We wanted a mortgage lender that would be helpful and not put up barriers to qualifying for a mortgage. Ask who might be willing to work with you. Consider where you or your family or friends do their banking.

Ask your realtor and others about which mortgage lender to approach. You also will benefit from having a realtor who has a special interest in you or who has knowledge of low-income home programs.

Keith's search was lengthy and involved coordination with staff schedules, Keith's housemate, DMRS, and others. Sometimes we had eight people touring a home and not all realtors are that patient. We were blessed with having Martine Hobson, a realtor for Prudential, as Keith's realtor. She has a daughter with Down syndrome and stuck with us through the whole six months, determined to find the right house.

A successful closing

We were surprised when, at the last minute, the closing attorney wanted documentation of Keith's competence to sign for a mortgage. It was too late to argue about the "legality" of the request, but at your closing, be prepared to show who has the legal authority to make financial decisions. Know also that closing costs can add a lot to the purchase price of a house, but they can be negotiated. Don't be afraid to ask banks to compete on their closing costs and remember that they have to provide an estimate of these costs prior to the closing. Finally, we had to be sure that the bill for the mortgage payment would be sent to the right place so that it would be paid on time.

If you ask Keith what he likes about his home, he says, "I like to be the house owner. I like having a place I can stay in as long as I want. I like being close to my family. I got to choose where I live."

Carol Greenwald is past president of The Arc of Tennessee.

All photos by Carol Greenwald



Keith Greenwald (right) with his roommate, Damien Stewart (left) and Paul Landers, WTFS Executive Director.



Keith Greenwald (left) and Damien Stewart relax on their deck.

A NEW LEVEL of INDEPENDENCE and PRIVACY

BY LYNETTE SWINFORD

When Paul Ford comes home from the office, on most days he plays with his dog, Lilly, checks his e-mail and settles down for a quiet evening alone in his own home. Mr. Ford is a programmer analyst for the State of Tennessee, Division of Mental Retardation Services. He has worked for the State in the information systems field for over 19 years.

Quiet is what many of us wish for after a long day at work. For Mr. Ford, the quiet is a change. All of his adult life he's had a family member or personal assistant living with him. The arrangement worked well, with Mr. Ford providing living space in exchange for assistance with his physical needs. But beyond just peace and calm, Mr. Ford was missing the privacy that many homeowners enjoy. Now, he's created an arrangement more suited to his own needs and lifestyle: he built a home for his support person right next door.

"Ultimately, the decision to build two houses next to each other was based on comfortability, independence and privacy," says Mr. Ford.

Maximizing potential

Born and raised in Nashville, Mr. Ford has Arthrogryposis Multiplex Congenita, a rare condition that affects the use of joints and muscles in the body. Early on, doctors recommended to his parents that Mr. Ford be put in an institution because his mother and father had to care for

five other children. "My parents objected profusely to that," Mr. Ford says. "Institutionalization was never an option."

Instead, they searched for a doctor who would help maximize Mr. Ford's potential to live independently. A series of childhood surgeries relaxed his muscles, but also left him with little use of his arms and legs.

From seclusion to inclusion

From preschool through high school, being included in a typical classroom proved to be a barrier for Mr. Ford, who spent most of his early education secluded from his peers. College was the first time he had a taste of life outside of an environment that focused on separating students with disabilities. After doing research on campus accessibility, Mr. Ford attended St. Andrews Presbyterian College in North Carolina.

There were students with disabilities in all of the dorms and multiple levels of assistance available. St. Andrews was a very diverse school, with students representing many different religions, ethnic backgrounds and disabilities. According to Mr. Ford, "It gave me a chance to see that, hey, there is a much broader world out there. I think it was what really began to shape the person that I am now. I came back with a stronger backbone and more of an ability to know what I needed and wanted out of life."

The advantages...

One of those new found desires was for homeownership. In October 2007, Mr. Ford purchased two homes, one for himself and one next door for use as a full-time personal assistant (PA) residence. The second home provides an opportunity for a PA to live and provide services for Mr. Ford in exchange for rent. Mr. Ford is finding this to be advantageous on a number of levels. He finally has his privacy, but also the convenience of having someone to provide assistance when needed.



Paul Ford in front of his home.

All Photos by Lynette Swinford

The two work out a schedule based on Mr. Ford's needs, which can also be flexible when his busy life changes. "I had gone back and forth for years debating whether downtown condos or two houses out of town would be more feasible for me," Mr. Ford recalls. "Ultimately, building two homes was the right choice for me."

...and the challenges

Along with the advantages, Mr. Ford has learned there are some challenges in having his PA next door rather than in the same physical location. "We've got to learn to coordinate a little better," explains Mr. Ford. "We've got to learn to communicate a little better, too. We're in two different houses now, so I don't know when he's not home. Obviously, he has to let me know that he's going to leave for a few hours, just in case something were to come up."

Better communication includes getting down to some legal issues too. Mr. Ford recommends using a rental agreement to protect the interests of both parties. According to Mr. Ford, the document establishes boundaries and limits for what the renter can do with the property, which helps guard his investment. He also acknowledges that he struggles sometimes with the "not charging any rent" decision. "This is the real challenge, because a lot of days there just isn't that much I need," Mr. Ford says. "A max of four hours of assistance per day on most days. I'm still trying to find the balance between the value of the house rental and the work he does for me."

There are personal boundary issues too. "You've got to have a balance between making a friendship with this person and making them your employee," suggests Mr. Ford. "I think I've done a fairly good job at it. He and I were friends before I hired him, but I think we're working it out really well."

Off the beaten path

Another big disadvantage of building the homes away from the city was losing access to public transportation. Mr. Ford is hopeful that the Metropolitan Transit Authority system will keep expanding and eventually come to his area. "It's been an interesting mix of transportation situations," Mr. Ford says. "At this point, I'm not able to go anywhere by myself, like I did when I lived on a bus route. It was a big debate for me, but it hasn't turned out to be the issue I thought it might. Because I have the house here the way I want it, and I don't have my PA right here on top of me all the time, I haven't felt the need to get away for privacy. It's ended up balancing the tradeoff of not being able to go to the corner to catch a bus."

Not a cookie cutter home

Having his house "the way he wants it" took some creative doing. But Mr. Ford believes that working with the builder to alter the design plans to meet his accessibility needs was a positive experience. "This would not be a normal, cookie cutter home," says Mr. Ford. "These guys were excited to do it and were willing to work with me to modify the floor plan."

Being able to custom build a home has increased his independence even further. A small thing like removing an L-shaped counter in the kitchen made a big difference. "Given my level of disability, there's really



Top: Lilly. Below: Paul Ford and his collection of remote controllers.

no cooking I can do," says Mr. Ford. "But I put in a microwave center that I can pull up to with my wheelchair, in case I can find a way in the future to use the microwave independently."

Wired to the max

Technology is a big part of Mr. Ford's home life and quest for autonomy. Glance around and you'll see surround sound components, various electronic gadgets and multiple entertainment remotes. There's assistive technology too, like the device on the front door that lets Mr. Ford open and close it at the touch of a remote. There's the track in the reinforced ceiling in the bedroom that supports a lift, which assists Mr. Ford in getting around without his wheelchair. The lights and ceiling fans throughout the house are wired so Mr. Ford can operate them from wherever he is. He's able to control his myriad of remotes and gadgets with the use of a stick in his mouth—yet another example of assistive technology.

Part of a growing community

Beyond his private domain, Mr. Ford has enjoyed getting to know his neighbors. While it's still a new, growing community, he's met all the surrounding homeowners and has had some over for dinner a few times. "If I were to sum it up, I'd say the best route to independence and being accepted is for people to get past this separation of those with and without disabilities," Mr. Ford says. "More inclusiveness in the community is key. It all comes from a need to just learn to be together and to eliminate all the different segments that society has tried to force on us."

"I think I'm really going to like it here."

Lynette Swinford is fiscal manager for the Council on Developmental Disabilities.

Good DeeDS *of* OAK RIDGE

Helps Folks **REMAIN INDEPENDENT**

BY ANDY OWEN

Due to health issues, Clarice Crooms was prohibited from physically leaving her home for over a year. She could walk short distances, but wasn't able to safely navigate her home's steps without help. Her illness was degenerative in nature and prognosis for her physical improvement wasn't positive. She didn't want to move from her home and the prospects and cost of continued home care looked bleak. She's a proud lady who's always taken care of herself and didn't want help.

Ms. Crooms simply needed a way to make her home more accessible, but couldn't afford the cost of a wheelchair ramp. She had contacted multiple agencies for assistance and finally stumbled upon the disAbility Resource Center of Knoxville (DRC). DRC had Ms. Crooms fill out some paperwork, verifying that she qualified for public assistance funds, and contacted me at GooD DeeDs of Oak Ridge to construct a wheelchair ramp at her residence.

I went to Ms. Crooms' home and made some recommendations. Once the initial ramp was approved, we designed, estimated and priced a material list. When this was approved by DRC, GooD DeeDs transported the building material to Ms. Crooms and began construction of her ramp.

Ms. Crooms wanted to combine her existing porch with an accessible ramp and, if possible, leave the original steps. Construction involved shoring up the porch and creating a separate exit point. GooD DeeDs spent 28 hours constructing the ramp.

Ms. Crooms was quite relieved when it was finally completed. She can now leave her home to get her mail and enjoy the sunshine!

But that's not all. Ms. Crooms can now remain in her home. She has regained her independence and can again relish the simple pleasures of a soft breeze and talking to her neighbors.

**With the help of volunteers and supporters,
we'll keep growing and continue to do what
we can to help people who want to maintain
their independence.**

GooD DeeDs of Oak Ridge is a project I started about a year ago. It's a work in progress and it keeps evolving! Basically, I wanted to do something to help seniors in my local community. I've seen first hand the conditions of the assisted living facilities and felt that something needed to be done to accommodate the growing number of elderly folks in this country. I happen to enjoy working with wood, framing and building playgrounds and porches for my family. So I put the two ideas together and figured I could build wheelchair ramps too.

I talked to a few people about my idea and found out it wasn't as easy as just building ramps for people! I had to protect my family from

liability issues associated with building structures that I could not maintain. Therefore, I formed a not-for-profit 501(c)3 organization to shelter my personal finances. Next, I was able to find a funding source for the building materials and began building the ramps.

GooD DeeDs also builds egress structures, widens doorways and installs handrails for seniors and people with disabilities in counties near Knoxville. We've helped 19 families and currently have eight on a waiting list. I work a 40-hour week at my paying job, but make time on the weekends to pursue my dream of helping people help themselves.

With the support of my family, GooD DeeDs has expanded from an idea to a working enterprise. Word has spread and the need far outweighs the resources that GooD DeeDs can offer. But, with the help of volunteers and supporters, we'll keep growing and continue to do what we can to help people who want to maintain their independence.

The rewards for me are great! I very much enjoy what I'm doing, and feel we are making a difference in our community.

For more information contact:

DRC: 865-637 3666 • Andy Owen: 865-483-0007.



Before the ramp.



Ramp under construction.



Clarice Crooms surveys her ramp.

All photos by Andy Owen

PART of a DIVERSE COMMUNITY

BY NED ANDREW SOLOMON

Paul Davis seems right at home, which is how it should be. Sitting in the comfortable living room of his house in the Paragon Place neighborhood of Nashville, settled in with his furniture, books and DVDs, musical keyboard, walls full of original art and a barbeque grill on the back patio, it's hard to believe that less than two years ago he was struggling to get services, languishing on a waiting list and residing in less than optimal circumstances.

Thanks to the Home of Your Own project, a continuation of activities begun under a grant by the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities, and a partnership of several entities—Habitat for Humanity, The Arc of Davidson County and The Down Syndrome Association of Middle Tennessee—Mr. Davis now has a diverse group of neighbors he can count on and who count on him.

"He is sole owner, tax payer, mortgage payer and citizen," says George Davis, Paul's proud father. "He's part of the community. His neighbors know him and he knows the neighbors.

"This neighborhood where Habitat for Humanity built homes is so culturally, racially, ethnically diverse, it's incredible. It's like going into the United Nations. There are homeowners from Kurdistan, Somalia, Ethiopia...people who left Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina and others with disabilities. And they all come together—no one cares about the differences."

As an adult on the autism spectrum, home ownership did not seem like an option a handful of years ago. Even today, Paul Davis doesn't do it alone. Through the Division of Mental Retardation Services, Mr. Davis gets a myriad of therapies in his home and lives with a companion, Pascal Mfashimgabo, who supports Mr. Davis in virtually every aspect of daily living. "As Paul's companion, we see Pascal as part of our family," says his father. "He went on vacation to Florida with us and he joins us for all our family events, if he wants to, including Christmas and Thanksgiving. That's the way it is."

Still, finding the right supports—especially the key live-in companion role—has been a challenge. Mr. Mfashimgabo is at the end of a long line of previous persons and provider agencies who did not work out. "It took awhile to find the right person," Mr. Davis' father explains. "We'd actually been through four agencies to find the 'right person', in our minds. We just felt that RHA [a non-profit provider based in North Carolina] was better equipped to work with Paul. They were willing to work with us, so it would be more of a collaboration between the family and the agency. In my opinion, it just can't work unless there's teamwork."



Left to Right: Pascal Mfashimgabo, George Davis, Paul Davis, Paula Davis

Photo by Ned Andrew Solomon

The team, including a behavior analyst, occupational therapists, a physical therapist, a speech language therapist and a nutritionist, establishes short and long-term goals for Mr. Davis, with input from him, his family and house staff—Mr. Mfashimgabo and other support persons who help Mr. Davis out during the day but don't live there. There also are mandated once-a-year planning sessions for Mr. Davis' Individual Support Plan (ISP) facilitated by his Independent Support Coordinator (ISC) and lots of informal meetings in person or by phone. Expectations are kept high, and Mr. Davis' family and support staff have seen a marked increase in his ability to participate in household chores, like doing laundry and cooking meals.

As a homeowner, Mr. Davis belongs to a homeowners association and pays dues into it. There's a neighborhood park that's shared by all and parties sponsored by Habitat for Humanity for homeowners to meet and stay connected to each other. "These are generally people who really struggled to get a home," says George Davis. "Hardworking people who really needed a break. This is their first home, they helped build it themselves and they worked very hard to get it."

And despite the frequency of paid providers visiting Mr. Davis' domain, it's a far cry from living in a large institutional setting or a group home with four, five or even eight other individuals thrown together more for the convenience of services than by personal choice.

Ned Andrew Solomon is director of Partners in Policymaking™ Leadership Institute and Youth Leadership Forum of the Council on Developmental Disabilities.



PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES & REAL ESTATE PROFESSIONALS

BY MELISSA FORTSON

Is it possible for people with disabilities to own their own homes? Is there anyone who can help people with disabilities and their families find housing that is accessible and affordable?

The answer to both of these questions is YES. Homeownership and the personal and financial independence it affords have long been integral to the “American Dream”. In addition to the ability to build equity and assets, for people with disabilities homeownership signifies stability, self-determination and community integration. Because the home buying process is trying for everyone and because the disability community faces additional barriers—attitudinal, financial and otherwise—many turn to real estate professionals for assistance. Real estate professionals can help people with disabilities locate housing and federal, state and local financial assistance programs. Finding a real estate professional who is able and willing to address the needs of people with disabilities is key.

The National Home of Your Own guide suggests that the most effective way to shop for a house is by working with a real estate professional and describes how agents can:

- help you determine how much you can afford to spend on a house;
- use your list of features for an ideal home to generate a computer printout of houses that meet your specifications;
- show you houses that meet your requirements;
- provide you with information about a community, including the prices and features of houses in the area, the location of schools, property tax rates, unusual building code regulations and availability of community services;
- assist in locating foreclosures;
- present your offer to the seller; and
- advise you regarding mortgage lenders, real estate settlement agents, professional home inspectors and title companies.

To locate an agent, the National Home of Your Own Alliance suggests asking a friend who has recently purchased a home for a referral. Real estate referral services may be found online or in the phone book and the National Association of REALTORS® (NAR) offers an online Find a REALTOR® Search. Both the Tennessee Association of REALTORS® and the Tennessee Department of Commerce and Insurance can provide information about licensed real estate brokers and firms.

The barriers limiting homeownership for people with disabilities also present challenges for real estate professionals who work with them. Limited income and assets make it difficult to accumulate a down payment and establish credit. Persons with physical disabilities may have difficulty viewing or inspecting homes due to lack of access. Faced with these challenges, real estate professionals may be hesitant to work with people with disabilities. While there is not a certificate or designation signifying expertise in working with people with disabilities, real estate professionals have access to training and resources that can better equip them to meet the disability community’s needs (see Related Resources).

The NAR offers an “At Home with Diversity” certificate course that addresses Fair Housing, diversity and inclusion, including disability-related concerns. Disability and other advocacy agencies can help agents increase their familiarity with access and accommodation issues and the disability laws that apply to housing, such as the Fair Housing Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

In addition to taking advantage of training opportunities, real estate professionals can strengthen their ability to serve clients of all abilities by familiarizing themselves with homeownership programs for people with disabilities. Federal, state and local housing agencies administer programs that provide low interest rates for first time buyers who meet income requirements; down payment and closing cost assistance programs also are available. REALTOR®, the magazine of the NAR, offers suggestions to improve the home buying experience for people with disabilities.

- Assemble a local resource guide including "information on community resources, employment, transportation, and recreational, medical, and educational facilities and services."
- Include these local resources on your Web site.
- Develop strategic alliances with local disability organizations.
- Make the disability community aware of your interest and abilities to meet their needs by holding a home buying seminar or speaking at disability-related conferences and events.
- "Be mindful of the accessibility and design of your office. For instance, make sure space between furniture and aisles can accommodate wheelchairs."

In their advertising, real estate professionals should use appropriate People First language and include their willingness to make reasonable accommodations.

While buying a home can be especially challenging for people with disabilities and their families, working with a real estate agent can simplify the process. By availing themselves of training opportunities and other resources, real estate professionals can effectively meet the needs of the disability community. People with disabilities working with professionals willing and able to address their needs—that's good business.

Melissa Fortson is information & referral specialist/program coordinator with Tennessee Disability Pathfinder.

Real estate agent vs. REALTOR®: What's the Difference?

A person with a real estate license is a licensed real estate professional or an agent. They may or may not be a REALTOR®. Professionals using the "trademarked" designation are members of the National Association of REALTORS® and agree to abide by its Code of Ethics.

— RELATED RESOURCES —

Home Access Program

<http://www.homeaccessprogram.org> • 800-87- RAMP

An initiative of Handi-Ramp, a manufacturer and distributor of accessible home products. Provides accessible home listings and a realtor and consultant database.

National Association of Realtors

<http://www.realtor.org> • 800-874-6500

Membership organization for real estate professionals. Offers real estate agent education, including online classes. Provides REALTOR search and referral.

New Horizons Un-Limited, Inc.

<http://www.new-horizons.org/houcat.html>

Housing resources and information for people with disabilities.

TENNESSEE DISABILITY MEGAConference

The Sixth Annual Tennessee Disability MegaConference will be held May 28-30, 2008, at the Airport Marriott in Nashville, Tennessee. This three-day event brings together under one roof a wealth of resources for Tennesseans



with disabilities. The numerous sessions throughout the day are designed to inform and inspire not only people with disabilities, but also their family members and professionals who

work with the disability community. Special events are scheduled for the evenings of the conference and provide attendees with an opportunity to socialize and network.

For more information about the Sixth Annual Tennessee Disability MegaConference, including a list of presenters and registration details, visit our Web site at www.tndisabilitymegaconference.org or call 615-248-5878. You also may reach us toll free at 1-800-835-7077 or TTY at 615-298-2471. We hope to see you at Tennessee Disability MegaConference 2008!

VISITABLE HOMES IN TENNESSEE

BY ALICIA CONE, PH.D.

So what is visitability anyway?

At the most basic level, visitability refers to a home that has a few specific design or layout elements that ensure that a person who uses a wheelchair or experiences a mobility difficulty can easily visit that home. Visiting a home means the person can easily get into and out of the home, comfortably move about inside the home and use all the amenities on the first floor.

Visitability is also the movement to change home construction practices so that virtually all new homes offer specific features that make the home easier for people who have a mobility issue to live in and visit. Eleanor Smith, founder and director of Concrete Change, describes the concept of visitability as being very simple but having several interactive layers: spirit, features, scope and moment in history.

The spirit of visitability says that it's not just unwise, but unacceptable that new homes continue to be built with barriers to access, especially given the ease with which access can be built into new homes and the harsh effects major barriers have on so many people's lives.

The non-negotiable features of a visitable home are wide doorways with 32 inches of clear passage space, at least a half bath/powder room on the first floor and a zero step entrance approached by an accessible route on a firm surface. Other features of a visitable home are more flexible and should meet the needs of the person.

The scope of visitability has to do with "how it came about" in a particular geographic location. Was visitability introduced voluntarily or through legislation? Was a type of dwelling or a percentage of dwellings targeted?

Closely related to scope is the issue of "time in history". This refers to the "are people ready for it?" factor. Are people on-board or is there resistance that needs to be addressed? Are people willing to work together to achieve visitability in their local community or is there fighting among stakeholders? Is it an idea whose time has come?

The case for visitability

The Tennessee Disability Pathfinder Information and Referral Office at the Vanderbilt University Kennedy Center provides valuable data on service needs. According to their data, requests for housing

information have been in the top five most needed service categories for the past eight years. Low-income and accessible housing were the most frequent housing requests. There also were a significant number of requests for housing repairs, ramps and ways to make an existing house more accessible.

Between July 1, 2006, and June 30, 2007, the Tennessee Family Support Program served 6,068 families. The fifth most requested service was Home Modifications and 240 people used those funds to make accessibility adaptations to their homes.

According to the Tennessee Commission on Aging and Disability's (TCAD) State Plan on Aging, Tennessee experienced a significant growth in older populations between 1990 and 2000. The "over 60" population grew to 942,620, a 13.2% increase; the "over 75" population increased to 320,459, or 22.6%; and the "over 85" group increased to 81,465, a 39% increase. The aging of the population obviously has implications for housing needs.

In AARP's *Beyond 50.03: A Report to the Nation on Independent Living and Disability*, responses from 1102 individuals were discussed. All respondents were over 50 years old and experiencing a disability of some kind: physical mobility, vision impairment, hard of hearing or cognitive or emotional disability. The report found that persons 50 and older with disabilities strongly prefer independent living in their own homes to other alternatives. On average, people with disabilities aged 50 and older give their community a grade of B-/C+ as a place to live for people with disabilities.

One policy implication noted by the authors was to reduce the barriers to "aging in place" for persons with disabilities. Specifically mentioned were funding for home modification programs and incentives to builders to incorporate universal design into homes in order to improve independence and access for persons with disabilities and their families.

Another AARP report, *Beyond 50.05 A Report to the Nation on Livable Communities: Creating Environments for Successful Aging*, discusses the impact of home design on independence, engagement and successful aging. People age 50 and older who said they live in a

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14 →

A CASE FOR ONE LEVEL LIVING

About two years ago, Bob Goodall of Goodall Homes and Communities realized there was a growing segment of the market that was not being reached—home buyers who needed accommodations in home layout or design. He made the decision that his company would build "One Level Living" houses in an effort to make them more accessible to their owners and more "visitable" for the owner's guests.

"One Level Living" refers to homes with zero steps entrances, bedrooms on the first floor, wider hallways and doorways, lever handles, toggle switches, kitchen spacing, lower countertops and, in general, thoughtfully designed layouts for homeowners with mobility difficulties.

It can be a challenge to design a home with wider doorways and larger radius turns in a bathroom, but these are changes that just can't be done after the fact. Many builders choose not to focus on this niche.

For a builder to be profitable, it takes consistency combined with efficiency and doing things the same way over and over. When focusing on the design for aging individuals and the buyer with disabilities, individual needs vary.

Being willing to focus on building "visitable" homes means being willing to go against the standard way of doing things in this business. It's a commitment to being flexible and believing that everyone is deserving of a place to call home.

ACCESSIBLE HOUSING RESOURCES

COMPILED BY COURTNEY TAYLOR

Everyone needs a place to call home, a place

where one can feel at ease and comfortable. For some individuals with disabilities, specific accessibility requirements may be necessary in order for a home to be easy and comfortable. Below are local and national resources that provide various supports and services for individuals with disabilities and family members of individuals with disabilities who require and seek accessible housing. This list is selective; please contact kc.vanderbilt.edu/tnpathfinder/housing.html for suggestions about other helpful resources.

Accessible and Affordable Housing Options are available through DisabilityInfo.gov. This resource provides information on housing laws, design and technical advice for people with disabilities, their family members, public housing organizations and the nation's builders. www.disabilityinfo.gov/digov-public/public/DisplayPagedo?parentFolderId=113

The **Accessible Builders Consortium, Inc. (ABC)** provides safe, affordable and accessible housing, residential wheelchair ramps and home modifications to persons who are at 80% area median income level and below. ABC serves the elderly, individuals with disabilities and families who are caring for a child with disabilities in Nashville and Middle Tennessee. <http://accessiblebuilders.org/>

Accessible Vacation Home Exchange is a project of The Independent Living Institute. It is a venue that allows people with accessible housing to swap homes with other persons with similar needs in other parts of the world. You can find out in advance how accessible the vacation home is, since you can ask your swap partner relevant questions. www.independentliving.org/vacawap.html

HomeChoice for People with Disabilities is a mortgage product designed to assist low- and moderate-income people who have disabilities, or who have family members with disabilities living with them. Call Fannie Mae's Consumer Resource Center at (800) 732-6643. www.efanniemae.com/sf/mortgageproducts/disabilities.jsp.

Home and Community Based Services has created the **Housing Coordinated with Services Theme Web Page**. This resource provides information for individuals and grantees interested in topics related to housing coordinated with services. The site lists events, articles and answers to frequently asked questions. In addition, it provides Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) System Change Grantees with contact information for technical assistance providers. www.hcbs.org/theme.php/1/Housing%20Coordinated%20with%20Services

Tennessee has developed a "**Housing Resource Locator**" for persons with severe and persistent mental illness. This Web-based tool, funded and operated by the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities (TN DMHDD), allows users to search by setting (urban vs. rural), living arrangement (independent, double, etc.) and by "consumer type" (severe and persistent mental illness or

substance abuse and mental illness).

www.adrc-tae.org/tiki-page.php?pageName=Web+Based+Housing+Registry

The **Informed Consumer's Guide to Accessible Housing** is a product of ABLEDATA, a project that provides objective information about assistive technology products and rehabilitation equipment available from domestic and international sources. www.abledata.com/abledata_docs/icg-hous.htm

The **National Accessible Apartment Clearinghouse (NAAC)** has developed an effective means to connect individuals with disabilities with apartments that have been designed for them or adapted to meet their needs. The NAAC maintains the only national database of accessible apartments, with a registration of more than 80,000 units in 50 states. www.accessibleapartments.org/website/article.asp?id=4

Opening Doors is a housing initiative designed to provide information and technical assistance on affordable housing issues to people with disabilities, their families, advocates and service providers across the United States. The Opening Doors initiative includes: Opening Doors, a quarterly electronic newsletter; state-of-the-art technical assistance; information dissemination and policy reports and recommendations to HUD and to Congress. www.c-c-d.org/task_forces/housing/intro_page.htm

The **Tennessee Fair Housing Council** is a private, nonprofit advocacy organization whose mission is to eliminate housing discrimination throughout Tennessee. The enforcement program is based in Nashville and concentrates on Davidson, Rutherford, Sumner, Williamson and Wilson counties. www.tennfairhousing.org/index.shtml

The **United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)** has a Web page designed to answer frequently asked questions on the housing rights of people with disabilities and on the responsibilities of housing providers and building and design professionals under federal law. There are sections on local home buying programs, local funding resources and information on HUD-funded local housing counseling. www.hud.gov/offices/fheo/disabilities/index.cfm

Since 1994, **West Tennessee Legal Services (WTLS)** has received funding directly from HUD under the Fair Housing Initiatives Program, Private Enforcement Initiative, for enforcement of the Fair Housing Act throughout Tennessee. One of their charges is to educate people about the Fair Housing Act, which makes it illegal for sellers or landlords to discriminate against homeseekers due to any of the protected classes: race, color, religion, national origin, gender or sex, families with children and persons with disabilities.

For more information, call 1-800-372-8346 (locally, 731-423-0616) or visit www.wtls.org.

Courtney Taylor is associate director of Communications and Dissemination at the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center.

home that is not able to meet their physical needs as they age scored lower on several key indicators of successful aging. The report specifically identified two main ways to change available housing to address the needs of an aging population: home modifications and improved new home design.

Interestingly, the report noted that while home modification is critical for those who don't wish to move from their existing homes, a recent Brookings Institution report showed that almost 60 million more housing units will be needed by the year 2030 to serve the nation's growing population and to replace some of the nation's aging houses. This wave of new housing will have to serve the future needs of residents of varying ages and varying abilities for several decades, representing a significant opportunity to incorporate accessible features into new construction of homes through either universal design or visitability.

While building new homes that are visitable is not the entire solution to the need for more accessible housing, it is a significant step forward in addressing this pressing concern. Since it is not possible to predict in which home a resident will develop a disability, it makes sense that homes would be built to a basic accessibility standard to decrease the need for people to leave their homes as they age or if they acquire a disability. Barriers related to access force people into institutions who could otherwise live at home. This need not, and should not, be the case. Communities must think about the vital role staying in one's home plays, along with being able to maintain relationships with family, extended family and friends, in the social and mental health of all people...with and without disabilities.

Are visitable features expensive?

Generally, adding basic accessibility features before construction adds little cost, while removing barriers in a home later on can be very expensive. That said, building new homes is an economical way to increase the number of accessible homes in Tennessee. In Georgia, for example, Concrete Change reported that adding three basic access features to new homes with a concrete slab cost \$0; adding those same three features to new homes built over a crawl space or basement cost \$300-600. National research on accessibility and visitability by the Council on Developmental Disabilities found that the cost to add the three basic access features to houses during the development stage—before the houses were built—ranged from \$0 to \$75 and that the range of cost for adding those features to houses built over basements or crawl spaces during the same stage was \$300 to \$1500. These are very reasonable costs, because the builder has the opportunity to plan, site and grade for cost effectiveness.

The Georgia model

The EasyLiving Home^{cm} program in Georgia has been very successful in promoting construction of first level accessible homes. It is the nation's first voluntary certification program that specifies first level accessible features in new home construction. Developed by the Georgia Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, with assistance and cooperation from the Georgia Homebuilders Association and other interested groups, the program includes a broad coalition of public and private organizations that partner to encourage and assist homebuilders throughout the state to build visitable homes in all price ranges.

EasyLiving Home visitable features include: a step-free entrance with a threshold of not more than one-half inch from a driveway, sidewalk or other firm route onto the main floor; no less than one bedroom, a kitchen, some entertainment area and at least one full bathroom with designated maneuvering space on the main floor; and every interior door on the main floor—including bathrooms—and the exterior door that provides the step-free entrance has a minimum of 32 inches of clear passage.

New Tennessee Council initiative

After researching the Georgia model, the Council began the process of bringing other stakeholders together to develop a Tennessee EasyLiving Homes Program. The Council and our partners established the Visitability Work Group in April of 2007. Members include a real estate broker, representatives from five companies that construct new homes, representatives from both the statewide and Middle Tennessee home builders associations, a representative from the Tennessee Housing Development Agency, representatives from four disability advocacy groups and representatives from two advocacy groups from the aging/senior community. The goal of the work group is to promote the construction of first level accessible—visitable—homes through a voluntary certification program for new home construction.

The Visitability Work group quickly agreed that the EasyLiving Home Model of Georgia should be replicated in Tennessee and that a grantee would be sought and selected using the Council's call for application (CFA) process. The work group members developed a CFA announcing the project and, in October, distributed it and the competitive grantee selection process began. The project is due to begin May 1, 2008.

The project will be seeking builders interested in becoming a builder of EasyLiving Homes and educating people in the community about the desirable features of a visitable home.

Alicia A. Cone is project research and development coordinator with the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities.

The COMING WAVE of HOUSING

BY RUTH FENNELL

Tennessee, like many other areas, is seeing a wave of change in how people look at their homes. This change is being driven by 78 million aging Baby Boomers. According to the 2000 U.S. census, there were 35 million people 65 years and older, 12.4% of the U.S. population.

It is projected that by 2035 this demographic will double to over 70 million people. Furthermore, 17.5 million people—one-half of all seniors—are currently experiencing limitations in life activities, including almost a third who reported problems using stairs or steps.

Tennessee has projected its 65+ population growth to be over 13.2% during the coming years. The beginning of this demographic shift in 65+ citizens has been seen between 2000 and 2005, with a population

TENNESSEE DISABILITY HOUSING ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

BY DEANA CLAIBORNE

United Cerebral Palsy of Middle
Tennessee (UCP), the Tennessee

Housing Development Agency (THDA) and a variety of collaborating agencies across Tennessee announce the creation of the Tennessee Disability Housing Assistance Program. As the lead agency, UCP has been allocated a two-year grant in the amount of \$600,000 from the Tennessee Housing Trust Fund. Working through a statewide partner network, these funds are designated to meet specific home and community based housing needs of low income persons with disabilities in Tennessee who do not receive housing supports through state Medicaid Waiver programs. THDA has targeted the program to Tennessee rural communities. Residents of the four largest urban counties—Davidson, Knox, Hamilton and Shelby—are currently not eligible for the program.

USES OF THE FUND

The fund may be used for a variety of purposes specific to disability related housing needs, including:

1. construction activities specific to disability needs, such as widening doorways for wheelchair access, modifying bathrooms and installing grab bars;
2. funding assistance to move from a non-accessible home to an accessible home;
3. funding assistance to move from a nursing home or institutional setting to a community based setting;
4. funding assistance to assist a homeless person with a disability to move into a home;
5. housing related assistance in emergency or crisis situations, such as fire, flood or other natural disaster, death of a primary caregiver, extended hospitalization or a medical emergency such as a recently acquired severe disability; and
6. weatherization of a home where a person with a severe disability lives.

ELIGIBILITY

Eligibility for the fund was established according to the same basic criteria as the Tennessee Family Support Program. Applicants must have a documented disability that results in a substantial limitation in three or more major life activities and the disability must be long-term or likely to continue indefinitely. Individuals also must meet the family income guidelines established by THDA. These guidelines are based on total household income and the number of people living in the home.

FUNDING PER HOUSEHOLD

While the maximum amount allowed per household is \$4000, most of the grants are smaller, with an average in the \$1,000 to \$1,500 range. That will ensure serving as many people as possible with the available funding.

The program also requires a 50% match for each grant. This means that a \$1,000 grant would require a \$500 match. Some families may have their own cash match for their project, while others may not. Those who don't should still apply, since the program will try to connect the applicant with a community organization that can help with the match. Additionally, the match does not have to be a cash match—it can include volunteer services, donated supplies and other in-kind resources.

For more information about the Tennessee Disability Housing Assistance Program or to download an application, go to www.ucpnashville.org. Also available on the Web site is the application for the UCP/THDA Wheelchair Ramp Program.

Deana Claiborne is executive director of United Cerebral Palsy of Middle Tennessee.

growth in Knoxville of 14.1%, Memphis with a 15.2% increase, and a 19.1% boom in the Nashville and Murfreesboro areas.

With more and more people living longer, the concept of being able to “age-in-place” is becoming increasingly attractive. The short- and long-term ability to enter a home with ease, maneuver around the living areas smoothly and have no difficulty with activities of daily living (ADLs) is proving desirable for new home buyers and

appealing for owners of existing homes. Through “aging-in-place” initial design or modifications, such as zero clearance entries, wider halls and doorways and bedrooms on the primary floor, individuals and their family members can comfortably live or visit in the present and in the future.

Ruth Fennell is a Tennessee licensed real estate broker.

HOUSING OPTIONS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Below are examples of housing options for people with disabilities. Contact Pathfinder for other ideas or specific program information.

Privately owned subsidized housing. The government gives funds directly to apartment owners, who lower the rents they charge low-income tenants. These low-rent apartments are for senior citizens and people with disabilities, as well as for families and individuals. To apply, visit the management office for the apartment(s) that interest you. To find participating apartments, contact the local public housing authority. (Visit the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD) at <http://www.hud.gov/renting/> for more information.)

Public housing. These are multifamily units, subsidized for people with disabilities who meet

income requirements. To apply, contact the local public housing agency.

Section 8 rental assistance (voucher) program. This program allows very low-income persons to choose and lease affordable privately-owned rental housing. The participant is free to choose any housing that meets the requirements of the program and is not limited to units located in subsidized housing projects. To apply, contact the local public housing agency or Tennessee Housing Development Agency (THDA) office that administers the program. These agencies also can provide a list of participating properties. (Visit the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD) at <http://www.hud.gov/renting/> for more information.)

USDA Rural Development. This entity offers housing loans, low-interest mortgages and home rehabilitation grants and loans for persons meeting income guidelines.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Tennessee Disability Pathfinder

English & Español
(615) 322-8529
(800) 640-4636

TTY/TDD users:
please dial 711 for
free relay service

www.familypathfinder.org

tnpathfinder@vanderbilt.edu



Melissa Fortson is information & referral specialist/program coordinator with Tennessee Disability Pathfinder.

RESOURCE SPOTLIGHT: TENNESSEE HOUSING RESOURCES

These housing-related resources—and more!—can be found on the Pathfinder Web site at www.familypathfinder.org.

ACCESSIBLE BUILDING CONSORTIUM

A Community Housing Development Organization (CHDO) that contracts with Metropolitan Nashville government to build affordable, accessible housing for older adults, people with disabilities and their caregivers who meet income requirements.

Phone: (615) 206-7321

Email: accessiblebuilders@comcast.net

Web: www.accessiblebuilders.org

SELF-HELP BOOKLETS

The Legal Aid Society of Middle Tennessee and the Cumberlands publishes free, easy to read legal help booklets. Booklets address applying for low cost housing, renter's rights and more. The booklets are available on the Legal Aid Society's Web site at

<http://www.las.org> (click on "Self Help Booklets")

or by calling 1-800-238-1443.

TENNESSEE CREATING HOMES INITIATIVE

The "Housing Within Reach" Web site provides information about housing options for people with mental health and co-occurring

disorders. Housing resources for consumers and developers, consumer rights and other housing issues are addressed.

Web: <http://www.housingwithinreach.org>

TENNESSEE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

A statewide agency charged with preventing and eradicating discrimination in employment and housing. Contact the Commission for information about Fair Housing or if you feel your rights have been violated.

Phone: (800) 251-3589 • Web: www.state.tn.us/humanrights

TENNESSEE MANUFACTURED HOUSING ASSOCIATION FOUNDATION

Provides assistance to owners of manufactured homes, including the repair, improvement and sometimes replacement of manufactured homes.

Phone: 800-989-8642

Email: tnmhf@bellsouth.net • Web: <http://www.tnmha.org/>

UNITED CEREBRAL PALSY OF MIDDLE TENNESSEE

Builds ramps and collaborates with agencies, church and civic volunteers, and other groups to construct wheelchair ramps for individuals with mobility disabilities whose homes are without proper accessibility.

Phone: 615-242-4091

Email: request@ucpnashville.org • Web: <http://www.ucpnashville.org/>

Tennessee Disability Pathfinder has phone, Web and print resources in English and Spanish to connect the Tennessee disability community with service providers. Referral services, free of cost, are provided to persons with disabilities, family members, service providers and advocates. Pathfinder is a joint project of the **TENNESSEE COUNCIL ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES** and the **VANDERBILT KENNEDY CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**.

TWO NEW COUNCIL MEMBERS APPOINTED

In September, 2007, Governor Bredesen appointed two new members to the Council on Developmental Disabilities and *Breaking Ground* is pleased to introduce them.

Missy Herndon lives in Newport and is one of three At-Large representatives on the Council. Ms. Herndon is a recent Partners in Policymaking™ graduate (2006-07).

Ms. Herndon says she plans to offer the Council "...new and fresh ideas from a personal viewpoint. I have dealt with issues concerning people with disabilities all my life. I also know how much technology can help people with disabilities and the need for more people to get the opportunity to use technology to communicate with others, as well as in a workforce.

"I would love the opportunity to help kids with disabilities get what they need from the school systems. It would have been a lot easier for me if someone who had been there was available to give me advice.

"If I were to help just one person with a disability by being on the Council, then I...have accomplished something worthwhile."

Marilyn L. Sortor, who lives in Memphis, is one of two representatives of the Memphis-Delta Development District on the Council.



Missy Herndon



Marilyn L. Sortor

Ms. Sortor is an active member of Tennessee Federation of the Blind and has been learning computer skills at the Mid-South Access Center for Technology.

"I welcome the opportunity to participate on this Council as I believe that I can provide a voice for other individuals with disabilities. I have spent a lot of time seeking out resources so that I may live a fuller life, and it appears that Memphis is often overlooked by the state....

I am determined to see this corrected not only for myself, but for the benefit of Memphians of all types of disabilities."



Debbie Riffle

In addition to these new appointments, Governor Bredesen reappointed Debbie Riffle of Humboldt, representing the Northwest Tennessee Development District, and Mary Dale Greene of Columbia, representing the South Central Tennessee Development District.



Mary Dale Greene

The Council appreciates their continued commitment to its vision and mission.

TRACY PENDERGRASS: Council Public Policy Intern

Photo Ned Andrew Solomon



Tracy Pendergrass joined the Council on Developmental Disabilities staff as Public Policy Intern on October 1, 2007. Ms. Pendergrass graduated from Middle Tennessee State University with a BA in Mass Communications, specializing in Public Relations. Previously she worked with the United Methodist Publishing House as Promotions Coordinator and completed internships with the Tennessee Performing Arts Center and the American Red Cross in public relations.

Ms. Pendergrass is working with the Council through May 2008, dedicating most of her time to supporting the Developmental Disabilities Work Group and promoting the recommendations in the Fulfilling the Promise report. She is coordinating communications between the Work Group and district coordinators across the State, as well as maintaining a Web site to educate the public and policymakers about people with developmental disabilities in Tennessee.

Ms. Pendergrass has earned the reputation of being a 'quick study' in disability issues, as well as a skilled public speaker. She fits in well with the Council staff and Council members and fast became a welcomed addition to the Council family. "We were fortunate to find Tracy available and eager to work with us on publicizing the report and recommendations of the Developmental Disabilities Task Force," said Wanda Willis, Council executive director. "It will be hard to let her go at the end of her internship."

TENNESSEE SPOTLIGHT

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) advocates from Tennessee, **Pam Bryan, Sue Shaw, Bernie Goggins, Dotti Goggins and Kelly Sanders**, recently participated in the evaluation of TBI focused research proposals submitted to the 2007 **Department of Defense Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Brain Injury Research Program**. As consumer reviewers, they, along with prominent scientists, were full voting members at meetings to determine the scientific merit of these proposals.

Consumer reviewers were asked to represent the collective view of TBI survivors, patients and family members to help determine the impact of the research on issues such as injury prevention, screening, diagnosis, treatment and quality of life after treatment.

Kristy Millican, 2001 YLF graduate and 2007 YLF program assistant, is a member of a student advisory panel at the **University of Memphis** conducted by Student Disability Services director, Susan Te Paske.

The **Autism Solution Center, Inc.** in Cordova was recently nominated for and won the autism treatment center of the year award from *Age of Autism*, a Web site devoted to autism spectrum issues, edited by Dan Olmsted. The Center, created and run by 2000-01 Partners grad **Laura Corby**, provides resources and offers extensive workshops and trainings for persons with autism and their family members.

United Cerebral Palsy of Middle Tennessee recently held its **5th Annual Resolution Run** fundraiser and is happy to report it was the largest ever. Five hundred and fifty people pre-registered and, on race day, 300 more signed on. A number of UCP families participated in the race, including honorary chairs, **Tommy McAuley** and daughter **Mary, Lizzy B Solomon** and family and Board member **Cynthia Leatherwood** with her clan.

The event, sponsored by **Southeast Financial Federal Credit Union, Circle K, Crown Tent and Two Dudes Catering**, was covered by **WSMV Channel 4**. Proceeds from the Resolution Run benefit UCP's **Durable Medical and Adaptive Equipment Exchange Program**, reutilizing durable medical equipment for persons with disabilities of all types and ages.

2007 YLF graduate **Alex Hubbard** has been very busy! Accepted to five colleges, he has decided to attend **UT Chattanooga** in the Fall. Alex is also in the process of getting a guide dog, which he hopes to accomplish after an upcoming trip to Washington D.C.—a graduation reward from his parents.

2007-08 Partners participant **Tim Vogus** recently had a letter published in the *Wall Street Journal*. The letter promotes the concept of full, but meaningful inclusion for students with disabilities. The entire letter is reprinted here.

Consider the Subtleties of Mainstreaming

As a parent and an educator, I share the indignation of the mother you cited in the article "Schools Accused of Pushing Mainstreaming

to Cut Costs" (Page One, Dec. 14). No parent wants to see his child mistreated or underserved in a school district, but to place the blame on inclusion is to miss the real problem: schools that don't adequately implement the principles or practices of full inclusion with the necessary training, supports and resources required.

There have always been schools and school districts that have cut significant services for students, and students with disabilities have often been left to flounder without necessary educational support. However, that's not inclusion, it's educational irresponsibility and malpractice. Inclusion properly implemented, which takes a serious commitment from the district and all personnel, isn't the same as dumping students back into the non-responsive "mainstream" and calling it policy. Responsive and responsible inclusion requires changes in curriculum, pedagogy and school climate, as well as enriched teacher education. These are changes that benefit all children, not simply those with disability labels. Teaching children to live in a diverse, democratic society in which all people are valued and connected demands that we commit to doing inclusion well and not reframe cost-cutting measures as if they represented our best educational thinking or practices.

While reading your excellent survey of the mainstreaming movement and the controversy it has generated, I was struck by its parallels with the controversy over the deinstitutionalization movement. Both movements were started by the same pair of factors: the premature belief by some professional researchers that a dramatic cure was at hand and the eagerness of elected officials to reduce spending on groups that represented relatively few votes. Hopefully the debate on mainstreaming will learn from the experience of the deinstitutionalization movement. Concepts that sound great on paper get much more complex in practice.

Thank you for continuing to prominently highlight special education. However, you fail to provide a balanced treatment of how and when inclusion works well. Our five-year-old son with disabilities is in an inclusive environment with adequate supports (augmentative communication devices, an educational assistant and peer supports) and it has transformed his life. He has grown in ways we were told were not possible. My family and I worry that even a very careful reader of your article and series on inclusion might conclude that separate but equal is necessary in special education. That would be a travesty in direct contradiction to research on the matter as well as our experiences.

Dena L. Gassner, MSW, also a member of the 07-08 Partners class, has been beating the presentation trail. She recently had two presentations accepted for the **2008 Tennessee Disability MegaConference**, and two others accepted for this Summer's **Autism Society of America** national conference in Orlando, Florida. Ms. Gassner serves as director of **The Center for Understanding**, an individual/family coaching center serving individuals with Asperger's and other similar autism differences.

MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Become a Partner in Policymaking



WHAT IS PARTNERS IN POLICYMAKING™?

A free leadership training program for persons with disabilities and family members of persons with disabilities. Partners is a program of the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities.

WHAT DO PARTNERS LEARN ABOUT?

- The State and Federal Legislative Processes
- Inclusive Communities & Classrooms
- Proven Practices in Employment & Housing Services
- State-of-the-Art Technology
- Strategies for Self-Advocates & Advocates

WHEN DOES PARTNERS TAKE PLACE?

Every year, one weekend a month
September through April.

HOW DO I APPLY OR GET MORE INFORMATION?

Contact Ned Andrew Solomon at
ned.solomon@state.tn.us or
615-532-6556





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Project Conexión

COUNCIL STAFF

Wanda Willis, Executive Director
Errol Elshtain, Planning Coordinator
Mildred Sparkman, Administrative Secretary
Alicia A. Cone, Coordinator, Project Research
and Development
Lynette Swinford, Fiscal Manager
Ned Solomon, Director, Partners in Policymaking™
Leadership Institute
William Edington, Public Policy Coordinator
JoEllen Fowler, Administrative Assistant

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE COUNCIL, CONTACT THE COUNCIL OFFICE AT Parkway Towers, 404 James Robertson Parkway, Suite 130, Nashville, TN 37243-0228
TELEPHONE: 615-532-6615 **TTY:** 615-741-4562 **FAX:** 615-532-6964 **E-MAIL:** tnddc@state.tn.us **WEB:** www.state.tn.us/cdd

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